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Psalm 133

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Psalm 133— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

- Please read the [General Introduction](#) as well as the Introduction to [Book I](#) and [Book V](#).
- For common features found in the numerical analysis charts, see the [Key to the charts](#).

Specific features of Psalm 133

- Psalm 133 is a follow-up to Psalm 132. It reiterates the theme of the ‘anointed’ through the association of the idea of ‘anointing’ with ‘oil’, one of the metaphors used here.

Strophic structure

- Van der Lugt: 1-2, 3 (2 strophes, with 4 verselines and 9 cola, taking v. 2 as a tricolon).
- Fokkelman: 1, 2-3b, 3cd (3 strophes, with 5 verselines and 10 cola, taking v. 2 as two bicolic verselines, however, ignoring the *atnach*).
- Labuschagne: 1, 2-3b, 3cd (3 strophes, 4 verselines and 9 cola, taking v. 2 as a tricolon).

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the *atnach*.
- Column **c**: the central core; **d**: the framework.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in **brown**.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1	Heading שִׁיר תְּמַעְלוֹת לְדָוִד	3	= 3	+ 0		
	הִנֵּה מִה־טוֹב וּמִה־נָּעִים 1	5	5			5
	שְׁבֶת־אֲחִים גַּם־יִחָד־: 4	4		4		5
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1	9	= 5	+ 4	= 0	+ 9
2	כְּשֶׁמֶן הַטוֹב עַל־הָרֹאשׁ 2	4	4		4	
	יָרַד עַל־תְּזָקֶן יָקֵן־אֶחָדֹן 5	5	5		5	
	שִׁירָד עַל־פִּי מְדוּתָיו: 4	4		4	4	
	Middle colon, meaningful centre (4+1+4)	13	= 9	+ 4	= 13	+ 0
3a	בְּטֶל־חֶרְמוֹן 3	2	2		2	
3b	שִׁירָד עַל־הָרָרִי צִיּוֹן 4	4	4		4	
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 2-3b	19	= 15	+ 4	= 19	+ 0
3c	כִּי שֵׁם צִוְּהָ יְהוָה אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה 4	6	6		6	
3d	חַיִּים עַד־הָעוֹלָם: 3	3		3		3
	Strophe 3 Total, v. 3c-d	9	= 6	+ 3	= 0	+ 9
	Total, v. 1-3	37	= 26	+ 11	= 19	+ 18
	With the heading, v. 1-3	40	= 29	+ 11		

Observations

1. The middle colon is obviously the consciously designed meaningful centre (9 = 4+1+4):
שִׁירָד עַל־פִּי מְדוּתָיו
which runs down on the collar of his vestments.
2. It is difficult to see how this phrase can express the essential thought of the poem. Therefore, a still better candidate would be the larger central core, **vs. 2-3b** (9 + 19 + 9): the extensive elaboration on the theme of ‘living in unity together’ (v. 1).

Though I do not agree with Fokkelman's colometric division of v. 2 into two bicolic verselines by disregarding the atnach, his strophic division is worth considering:

Strophe 1, v. 1	How good is it when brothers live in unity	9 words
Strophe 2, vs.2-3b	Elaboration by means of two metaphors	19 words
Strophe 3, v. 3cd	There, on Zion, YHWH bestows his blessing	9 words.

The key to his understanding of the text appears to lie in the use of a double preposition *ke....ke...*, 'just like...so is', in כִּשְׁמֶן, 'like oil', in v. 2a, and כִּטֵּל, 'like dew', in v. 3a. Remarkably enough, Fokkelman does not refer to Psalm 131:2c-d to support his argument that Strophe 2 is a literary unity. There, we find a similar double, or more correctly, *repeated* preposition, a favourite stylistic device in the Songs of Ascents (compare the end of Observation 1 in my Analysis of [Psalm 131](#)): *

"Like an infant on its mother's back, like an infant on my back, so is my soul."

Therefore, the meaningful central core of Psalm 133 may be translated as follows:

- v. 2 **It is like the fragrant oil on the head,**
 Flowing down on the beard.
 The beard of Aaron,
 Which flows down on the collar of his vestments.
- v. 3 **It is like the dew of Hermon,**
 Flowing down on the mountains of Zion.

3. In v. 3b we find the 6th instance of the key-word 'Zion' in a range of 7 occurrences in the Songs of Ascents. For the symbolism and significance of this range, see Observation 7 in my Analysis of [Psalm 122](#).
4. A typical characteristic of the Songs of Ascents is that almost all have their total number of words defined by the numerical value of a key-word in the text. This makes it very likely that the editors of the Psalter, who supplied the psalms with headings, realised that Psalm 133 did not comply with this rule. Therefore, they chose a 3-word heading by adding לְדָוִד, 'for David', to the standard 2-word heading normally used in this corpus (with a few exceptions). The 3-word heading raised the number of words in Psalm 133 to the desired 40, which is the numerical value of both זִקֵּן, 'beard' (7 + 19 + 14), and אֶהְרֵן, 'Aaron' (1+5+20+14). At the same time, these two words now constitute the arithmetic centre of the whole text: 40 = 19 + 2 + 19.
5. There are 26 words before atnach in vs. 1-3. The name יְהוּדָה appears only in v. 3c.

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* See my article "The Metaphor of the So-Called 'Weaned Child' in Psalm cxxxi", VT 57 (2007), 114-123.